Reading Changes Lives

"Once upon a time" is the beginning to every classic story; the lovely way it lays on the page seems to set the story off on a beautiful path. But imagine if those letters said nothing to you or their meaning was lost in the struggle to sound out each word - a reality for millions of people around the world.

Illiteracy is a global problem. 16% of the world’s population cannot read — that’s 773 million people, and the number of youth worldwide is more than 123 million [UNESCO]. The Dominican Republic, where I serve as a Global Mission Intern, came in last place in a 2008 study of academic achievement in 16 Latin American countries.

Global Ministries, in its work with 270 partners in 70 countries, has a longstanding focus on education and the promotion of literacy. One partner in the Dominican Republic, Caminante Proyecto Educativo (Caminante Educational Project), has been working to improve the lives of racially and economically marginalized children, and those with learning and behavioral disabilities. The school strives to educate and empower the most vulnerable youth — child laborers and those who are at risk or victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Caminante addresses literacy and education by preparing youth for enrollment in public school and supporting after-school learning. To date, the organization has changed the lives of over 12,900 youth affected by sex tourism.

Benisia, 15 years old, is a success story of Caminante. When I met her a year and a half ago, she had just begun a girl’s empowerment program at Caminante. She rarely spoke, knew very little Spanish, and was very shy. Today, in her second year, she is reading, writing, and learning math. Benisia knows first-hand the difference literacy makes, and says when teenagers know how to read, they can find a better life for the Ashley Holst, a member of Zion United Church of Christ, Marion, Ill., serves as a Global Mission Intern in the Dominican Republic with Proyecto Caminante, and works with street children in Caminante’s outreach ministry.

You make the difference...

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